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China A-Secrets Target of Mail Cover

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

The main reason the Central Intelligence Agency monitored the mails between the United States and the Chinese mainland, according to secret testimony, was to pick up clues about China's atomic progress.

Testifying behind closed congressional doors, the former chief postal inspector, William Cotter, confirmed our earlier report that China mail was opened in the San Francisco Post Office. The purpose, however, has been kept secret until now.

Cotter's explanation didn't satisfy Rep. Charles Wilson (D-Calif.), who presided over the closed session.

"You said that the San Francisco project involved determining the point of development of atomic energy in China," pressed Wilson. "Now, how can a mail cover program determine such information?"

"You have got me, sir," Cotter confessed. He suggested that maybe "there could be some radioactivity on the exterior of the letter." But, of course, this wouldn't explain why the CIA had to open the envelopes.

Cotter said he had approved the illegal mail openings because he assumed

the operation had been approved by the President as a national security necessity.

The CIA has now informed the postmaster general, added Cotter, that spies are no longer meddling with the mails.

"We don't have any national security problems anymore?" asked Wilson.

"In this area, I don't think so," said Cotter. He referred to the practice during the Nixon years of watching the mail of suspected "subversives." Now, he said, "it is a different world, I think."

"I hope so," said Wilson.

Supreme Court Shenanigans — The Supreme Court has its own police force which, in keeping with the court's new law-and-order mood, is doggedly tracking some miscreants.

It all started with a party that court employees threw for their departing chief marshal, Frank Hepler, who has been eased out of his \$31,500-a-year job.

In a festive spirit, they ripped down some of the stern memos that Hepler had posted on the walls. These dealt with the duties, decorum and appearance of the court messengers, whom the ex-Marine commanded.

The case of the missing memos was

turned over to the Supreme Court's private police force. Chief Alfred Wong, with all the fanfare of a TV thriller, launched a full investigation.

He refused to discuss the case with us, in the best police tradition, presumably to avoid the slightest leak that might alert the culprits. But unhappily for law-and-order in the Supreme Court's messenger room, we have learned what Wong's dragnet has uncovered.

He shrewdly retrieved several crumpled memos from the trash bins. He was later observed taking fingerprints off one of the memos. Then one of the messengers, Thomas West, was called in by the court's Keystone Kops for repeated interrogations. On his final visit, he was told accusingly that two incriminating prints, matching those of his middle and index fingers, were found on the memo.

Working without fingerprint power or other police paraphernalia, we have solved the case. The truth is that several court employees took part in the caper.

But they may beat the rap. You see, Hepler forgot to post a memo forbidding employees to tear down his memos.

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